

VZCZCXRO2826
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2991/01 2290927
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 170927Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6317
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002991

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/16/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PNAT](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAYAN JABR AN POLITICS, AND "BAGHDAD BERMS"

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/REL GBR AUS) Summary: During an August 14 dinner with the Ambassador, Finance Minister Bayan Jabr proposed that MNF-I construct an earthen berm around Baghdad, while gradually expanding the Green Zone walls outward - with the ultimate goal of turning the whole of Baghdad into a green zone - to better protect Baghdad. Jabr, who was formerly Interior Minister under the Ja'fari government, said he assured Ayatollah Sistani that the US is not "anti-Shia." He sees the Sadrism phenomena as complex and not under Sadr's control. Jabr commented on former Prime Minister Ja'fari, and current Interior Minister Bolani (clean, but lacks leadership skills). Jabr blamed the Ja'fari administration for the current provincial governors' problems spending capital funds. End Summary.

¶2. (C/REL GBR AUS) On August 14, the Ambassador hosted Minister of Finance Interior Bayan Jabr and MNF-I Commander General Casey to discuss Jabr's proposal to build an earthen berm around Baghdad. The proposal would maintain the 22 existing check points and construct T-walls and additional check points to expand the current green zone outward "rings of security" until the fully expanded green zone meets the berm. He would also use natural features such as the Tigris River and the Army Canal to slice up Baghdad. At expressway off ramps, or major entry points into boroughs of the city, check points would ensure that only "clean" vehicles and people passed into the main business and residential areas. This would overcome a major objection he has to the Baghdad Security Plan phase II, which is that the terrorists and criminals have simply left Doura -the first 'cleared' zone - and moved to other boroughs, taking their weapons with them. Building the berm and the walls/check points would also provide employment for young men.

¶3. (C/REL GBR AUS) When asked about the perception that the US is favoring the Sunni and has turned against the Shi'a, Jabr confirmed that he had heard this theme. Recently he was in Najjaf talking to Ayatollah Sistani, and mentioned that he thought that the Americans were neutral, against killing, and definitely not anti-Shi'a. The Ayatollah twice intently asked him if Jabr really believed this statement, and Jabr assured him that this was really the case. Responding to a question, Jabr thought that Iraqi Shi'a do not interpret the friction between the US and Iran as "anti-Shi'a."

¶4. (C/REL GBR AUS) Jabr sees the "Sadr phenomena" as complex, while the Sadrists conflict with Badr is simple. Moqtada al-Sadr really cannot control the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, while Iran can control only some of the JAM militia. Some of the JAM members are loyal to Sadr personally, and with Sadr's cooperation could be reasoned with. But many others are really common criminals who have associated themselves with Sadr for their personal gain. The problem is

how to cause a split in JAM ranks, and then to identify who belongs in which camp. By contrast, the tension between the JAM and SCIRI's Badr Corps is 100 percent personality driven, based on conflicts between the fathers of Moqtada al-Sadr and Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim. There is no significant theological or philosophical distinction between the two families.

¶5. (C/REL GBR AUS) When asked about politics in the unity government, Jabr said that the negotiations to bring in the Sunnis made everything more complex. The question is: who is the best representative of each major group or faction to bring into the government? Harith Al-Dari (of the Muslim Ulama Council) is more effective with the Sunnis, but didn't enter the government, while Mahmoud Mashhadani is less effective with them, but agreed to be speaker.

¶6. (C/REL GBR AUS) As for his successor as Interior Minister, Jawad Bolani, Jabr said that he is a good guy - straight and clean - but has poor leadership and management skills. Bolani has a lack of relevant experience, and cannot focus on the issues during discussions.

¶7. (C/REL GBR AUS) Turning to his current position as Finance Minister, Jabr agreed that the provinces have been slow in spending the money allotted to them for construction projects, but blamed that on the Ja'fari administration. On taking office, Ja'fari had stopped construction projects right in the middle of the project, then refused to pay contractors for the work done, who were then unable to pay their workers. This caused a delay of eight months in construction projects. Recently, the 18 provincial governors met to discuss how to speed up construction projects.

¶8. (C/REL GBR AUS) Corruption takes many forms here, Jabr

BAGHDAD 00002991 002 OF 002

said. In the northern Iraq town of Haweija, the 25,000 to 30,000 inhabitants make a good living repairing the pipelines and electric power lines that pass through their area. They oppose the stationing of troops that might stem the frequent IED attacks (and the subsequent need for repairs). They directly benefit from chaos, under the guidance of town leaders who are former intelligence officers.

¶9. (C/REL GBR AUS) Comment: Jabr was his usual self, agreeable, warm and engaging while blaming Iraq's problems, including those of his own ministry, on others. However, he does have good ties to Sistani and has gained a significant amount of experience on the challenges of bringing security to Baghdad following his tenure at the Ministry of Interior.

¶10. (C/REL GBR AUS) BIO Note: Jabr's daughter is married and living in New York City. Her husband is a construction engineer, in the USA on an H visa (skilled worker), working in a NYC firm while finishing his Ph.D. in civil engineering at New York University. In 1982 Jabr moved to Damascus, and since he could no longer get Iraqi passports, the Syrian government gave him and his family Syrian passports (but not Syrian citizen ID cards). His daughter and son-in-law have applied for USA Permanent Resident (green card) status, and their petition is pending. She would like to travel to Baghdad to see her father, but is concerned that if she left the US with her green card pending, she might not be able to return for several years - until - and if - the DHS granted her petition. Jabr's daughter has a four year-old son, who telephones his grandfather everyday from New York, and another child, about three years old.

¶11. (C/REL GBR AUS) Discussing his background, he said that his grandfather and father were merchants in Iraq. In the 1970's, he had two Baghdad textile mills using Belgian and Swiss machinery. In 1982 he moved to Damascus. When he returned, he found the machines ruined from lack of maintenance. However, the factory site has about 5,000 square meters of land on the edge of the Mansour district, and the land is now worth much more than the machinery.

